

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING FEBRUARY 6, 2015

HB 6683

AN ACT NAMING A PORTION OF ROUTE 160 IN ROCKY HILL
AFTER JAMES VICINO

Testimony of Daniel Portland, 7 Canal Rd., Suffield, CT

**LEGISLATIVE PRACTICE OF NAMING ROADS AND BRIDGES AFTER
VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS**

The General Assembly should put an end to enacting bills that name roads and bridges after a select few favored individuals and groups for the following policy and legal reasons:

1. PLAYING GOD: The state should not be in the business of weighing the relative value of the lives of its residents and deeming some lives more valuable than others. Why is the sacrifice of a soldier who died in Iraq or Afghanistan more worthy of recognition than the lives of the soldiers who died in World War II, Vietnam and Korea? Why is one highway accident victim more worthy of remembrance than all the others who have died on our highways?

2. LACK OF CRITERIA: There appears to be no guidelines, criteria or established policy for how an individual's name is submitted for possible recognition, what an individual must accomplish during his or her lifetime to be worthy of this recognition or the manner in which the legislature selects the individuals for inclusion in this bill.

3. IDENTITY OF INDIVIDUALS NAMED: If roads and bridges are to be named after specific individuals, the common understanding is that those individuals are of long-lasting historical significance and made some extra-special contribution to or sacrifice for the state that merits recognition. Nathan Hale, Ella Grasso, Roger Sherman, Oliver Wolcott, Igor Sikorsky, Thomas Hooker. No one would be surprised to see bridges and roads named after these individuals and others with state historical significance.

But many state residents have died in the wars. Why does the state name bridges after some and not others? Why name a bridge after someone who had served honorably in WW2 and recently died? There are many residents of the "Greatest Generation" who are in that category.

4. NAMING INFRASTRUCTURE IN PERPETUITY: There is something wrong policy-wise to name the public infrastructure of the state, presumably in perpetuity, after individuals who have little present-day recognition, much less long-term recognition.

5. DIMINISHED HONOR: When the naming of roads and bridges, originally reserved for persons of state historical significance, is extended to persons whose contributions to the history and character of the state are no different than other state residents (and perhaps less), it diminishes and cheapens the honor rightfully bestowed on individuals who truly made a contribution to, or sacrifice for, their fellow state residents and the state.

6. WHERE WILL IT END: Naming roads and bridges after the first woman Governor, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention or a hero of the Revolutionary War is one thing, but when the state starts to name public structures after individuals who are no more noteworthy than their next door neighbor, where will it end? What happens when the next policeman, soldier, legislator, town council member, campaign contributor, law partner or state employee dies and their family member wants a road or bridge named after them? How does the legislature say no? What happens when every road and bridge in the state has been named?

7. DISTRACTIONS: Our highways are already congested and dangerous to drive as it is. We do not need more signs that will take drivers' eyes off the road and imperil those drivers and the drivers around them.

8. TICKY-TACKY: Naming every bridge and section of a highway only contributes to the ticky-tacky, "litter-on-a-stick" look of our primary roadways.

9. COST: In this time of severe budget shortfalls, and when services to the truly needy in our state are being cut, installing memorial signs is clearly an expense that cannot be justified.

10. CONSTITUTIONALITY: Naming roads and bridges after specific individuals, other than historically significant individuals, and especially with the lack of criteria for selecting those individuals, runs afoul of Article 1, Section 1 of the State Constitution, the constitution all elected officials took an oath to uphold. That section, notably the very first provision of the constitution, provides:

"All men when they form a social compact are equal in rights; and no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community."

It is time to stop the legislative pastime of naming roads and bridges after select individuals, sunset the existing signs, and establish a process to address the valid public policy reasons listed above and ensure that only the most deserving of Connecticut residents receive this honor.